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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 003098

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/26/2026

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: FINNISH PM URGES PROGRESS ON CYPRUS, REFORM

REF: ANKARA 2053

Classified by Polcouns Janice G. Weiner; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Visiting Ankara in the run-up to Finland's EU term presidency, Finnish PM Vanhanen told PM Erdogan May 17 that the EU is united on the need for Turkey to open its ports to Greek Cypriot shipping. Vanhanen said Finland will continue its policy of supporting the accession of all EU candidates that meet membership criteria, and praised Turkey's role as an example of democracy in a troubled region. Erdogan pledged to continue the GOT's EU-related reforms, but said Turkey cannot take any steps on Cyprus until progress is made in alleviating the isolation of the "TRNC." He did not offer any new initiatives to address the problems of Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Vanhanen held a one-on-one and a larger meeting with Erdogan and made courtesy calls on President Sezer and Parliamentary Speaker Arinc. Other GOT leaders, including FM Gul and Economy Minister and EU negotiator Babacan, attended a dinner in Vanhanen's honor. The Finnish DCM gave us a readout of the Vanhanen-Erdogan meetings.

Finland to Continue "Fair" Approach

¶3. (C) Erdogan told Vanhanen he is confident Finland will be supportive of Turkey as EU term president. He recalled that Turkey became an EU candidate in 1999 under a Finnish presidency. He averred that some EU states are putting obstacles in Turkey's path, and thanked Vanhanen for Finland's "more open minded" approach. Erdogan assured Vanhanen that the GOT continues to place a high priority on EU accession, and rejected claims that Turkey has lost interest in the EU reform process. He noted that the GOT in April announced a new package of reforms (reftel). Vanhanen assured Erdogan that Finland will continue its fair, logical approach to EU enlargement -- any country given candidate status should be allowed to become a member once it meets the criteria.

¶4. (C) Vanhanen told Erdogan the EU states are united on the need for Turkey to ratify and implement the Ankara Protocol, which requires Turkey to open its ports to Greek Cypriot shipping. He said Turkey is obliged to do so as a Customs Union member, and this obligation cannot be linked to any other issues. Vanhanen noted that the EU will release its annual progress report on Turkey in October or November. The report will address the Protocol issue, and this could harm Turkey's candidacy if there are no new developments. The report will also focus on human rights issues such as freedom of religion, freedom of expression, cultural rights, the draft anti-terror law, and civil-military relations.

¶5. (C) Erdogan said Cyprus remains a "sensitive issue" for Turkey. He reiterated standard Turkish complaints about the continued isolation of the "TRNC," despite the fact that Turkish Cypriots voted in favor of the Annan Plan. The GOT, he said, took the political risk of backing the Annan Plan, but has nothing to show for it. The EU took in the Greek Cypriots, but has not taken any meaningful steps regarding the "TRNC." All parties involved need to work toward a comprehensive solution that is just and fair. Erdogan stressed that Turkey cannot open its ports to Greek Cypriot shipping before progress is made in alleviating the isolation of the "TRNC."

No New Initiatives for Southeast

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¶6. (C) Vanhanen asked Erdogan whether he had a plan for addressing the chronic problems of Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast. Erdogan did not offer any new initiatives, instead outlining what he said were his government's accomplishments in the region. Erdogan said the GOT under his leadership has undertaken extensive improvements in the education, transportation, and water infrastructure in the region. He averred that the situation in the southeast is far better than outsiders have been led to believe by the propaganda of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Erdogan said the Kurds are one among 36 ethnic groups in Turkey. They are represented in government -- a number of MPs, for example, are Kurdish. Erdogan said "ethnic nationalism" is not tolerated, because all Turks have one nationality. Nevertheless, he said, there is no official discrimination based on ethnicity.

Alliance of Civilizations

¶7. (U) Erdogan touted Turkey's role in the Middle East as an example of democracy and rule of law. He noted that Turkey and Spain are co-sponsors of the Alliance of Civilizations. Turkey lives in a troubled neighborhood where democracy and human rights are in short supply. Turkey is in a position to help improve the situation, which is why the GOT supports the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative. Vanhanen said he appreciates Turkey's efforts to promote a dialogue between cultures, and noted that Finland has decided to join the Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations.

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